

Sufism for Western Seekers: Path of the Spiritual Traveler in Everyday Life

Stewart Bitkoff

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Shaping one's reality and directing one's thoughts and actions are among the mystical teachings within Dr. Stewart Bitkoff's newest book on Sufism. In this personal, semi-biographic spiritual guide, Sufism itself is redefined as being older and broader than the mystical branch of Islam that most know it as and its ancient teachings are updated and presented using accessible language to a Western, non-Muslim audience.

The chapters are written using a casual, often humorous question-and-answer format. By setting the book up as a dialogue, Bitkoff creates the sense of having recorded conversations that we have had with ourselves or our friends about spiritual matters or of having recorded exchanges that might occur during frank sessions with a spiritual teacher in a relaxed mystical school. Quotations from Sufi and other faith teachers are presented throughout to clarify the intended points, and each lesson ends with a summary and an activity to reinforce the teaching. While the format is generally engaging, some readers more accustomed to direct prose might find the conversational nature distracting. The appendices include an interview with the author and an article giving advice to those interested in studying in a mystical school.

Starting in the 1970s, the author studied with a teacher/master for four years and then studied for over ten years reading books from the Society for Sufi Studies and Idries Shah, in particular. While Bitkoff's own spiritual journey from Judaism to Sufism is recounted, his repeated aim is to make readers better Christians, Jews, and Muslims by sharing these mystical teachings, rather than to make converts. He also references his professional academic teaching and healthcare careers, which have included psychiatric rehabilitation, therapeutic recreation, and reintegration of the mentally ill into society.

Sufism for Western Seekers is not a historical or theological work about Sufism written for the academic market. Instead, this book is recommended for anyone seeking an easily relatable introduction to mystical thought and spiritual self-help practices from someone who has spent his life on a spiritual journey. The lessons and activities presented will challenge your perspective of reality and inspire you to improve yourself and to help others.

C. WILLIAM GEE (January 20, 2012)

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